

Women's Concerns

Report

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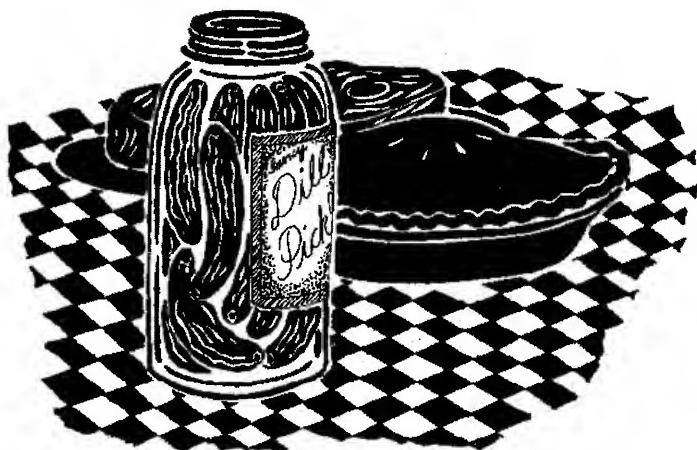
And Singles Bring Pickles

"And Singles Bring Pickles" is the title of an imaginary book that a single friend wants to write, describing very much what this issue of Report is about: being never-married in a couples' world. Families—you bring casseroles, desserts or salads, and singles (is the presumption here that we don't eat, or don't cook or can't afford groceries?)—you bring pickles.

Who are we, the never-married women in your midst? We are women struggling to fit into a church and a culture that revolves around the nuclear family. Are you married? we are asked. No. Divorced (which is to say, once married)? No. Widowed (again, once married)? No. Well then, is there a special someone in your life (are you in the process of becoming married)? Not necessarily.

We have never been married, either by choice or circumstance, but please, that's no reason to make us feel peculiar. Ask us about our work, our travels, our hobbies, our faith journey, our friendships, our nieces and nephews, our accomplishments and you'll find, perhaps to your surprise, that we lead productive and full (sometimes too full) lives. Like our married friends, we also have our disappointments, fears and frustrations, some of which are uniquely "single," but others which are just part of the human condition. Loneliness, for example, is no respecter of wedding rings.

Compiling this issue of *Report* was cathartic and encouraging, enlightening and disturbing. I am encouraged by Anne Dyck's frank admonition that the church family needs to act and speak more realistically about the "blissful state" of marriage. I felt a striking empathy with the contributor who wrote that she's never so painfully aware of her singleness as on Sunday morning during church. I share with the writers who speak of the overwhelming burden of decision making. I rejoice with those who describe fulfilling intimate friendships. I am grateful to the contributors—whom I know to be dynamic, productive and attractive women—who wrote candidly about the pain that goes with being single not by choice but by default. I was not at all surprised that there is a strongly perceived difference between being never-married and being widowed or divorced. And I cheer the message of Pauline Steinmann, Eleanor Good and others who challenge the church family to see us as people, not single people.



One of the greatest needs we have as human beings is to belong. You married folk have that need primarily fulfilled by your spouse and family. Indeed, our churches and our culture purport marriage to be the highest, truest and most normal way of fulfilling this need.

But many of us are not and may never be married. More than half of all American adults today are single. Some hurt badly, some are blissfully happy. "That the vast majority of singles reject the church may be a sign that the church has not responded to them in a meaningful way," asserts Charles M. Sell in *Transitions Through Adult Life*, (Zondervan, 1985). Only 30 percent of those who never marry attend any kind of weekly religious service, (Mennonite statistics may or may not be similar), and attendance is even lower for separated and divorced people. If the church continues to alienate single people, it will be alienating the majority of all adults in our society.

"Whenever they are asked," writes Sell, "Christian singles point to their need for fellowship with others—single and married—with a Christian context." And yet the outcry of singles is that they are made to feel peculiar. The writers in this issue give several examples of how that happens, intentionally or unintentionally.

So we deal with the external messages from friends, family, church and society that tell us we haven't quite "arrived." We also deal with our internal struggles. A survey of 3,000 never-married evangelical women revealed six common problems: loneliness, social pressures, fear, lack of money, lack of sexual activity and a tendency to become self-centered. Naming these fears and knowing you aren't alone can be empowering and comforting; ultimately, however, we are no different than any other interest group (childless couples, the unemployed, etc.) in realizing that having identified the problems we must then move towards overcoming them. Blaming a married society for our own problems seems simplistic and unhealthy; God wants us to lead happy, victorious and productive lives with or without a trip to the alter.

If society—even church society—makes us feel marginalized, that's one problem. If we marginalize ourselves, that's another. Single women need to seek God's peace about who we are and then make a place for ourselves in God's family. Feeling comfortable at couples-oriented social activities takes practice, but it is our responsibility as much as society's to make it happen. Finding inner peace takes prayer, meditation, reflection, maybe even counseling. But pursue it! God wants it for us!

I am convinced that one of the greatest things the church can do is to become more family-like (not more family-oriented). We never-married women crave your corporate acceptance and your individual friendship. Attitudes, not more singles' programs, are the answer. Whether we bring pickles, pies or pot roast, we want to feel wholly and completely welcome at the banqueting table.

—Doris Daley, compiler

When she isn't hefting boxes or speaking to groups for SELF-HELP Crafts, Doris Daley fills her waking hours with storytelling, walking, friendships and trying (so far in vain) to make butter tarts as good as her grandma's. She lives in Calgary and attends Trinity Mennonite Church.

by Anne Warkentin Dyck

If Marriage is a Bed of Roses, We Need to Talk About the Thorns

"Your remarks about the satisfactions you experienced as a single person have given me fresh courage and hope as I near the end of a painful divorce. It helps me believe that not only can there be life after divorce but that life can be satisfying."

The young woman who made these comments sought me out after I had spoken at a church retreat about my experiences as a woman in the church. We obviously didn't bring the same baggage into our singleness—she divorced and myself never married—but I encouraged her to go forth in the belief that she was indeed a worthy person in God's eyes—married or single! My own life's journey, consisting of a satisfying career, supportive parents and family, and congenial co-workers through many years of MCC life, had all contributed to my rich single life. Increasingly I became comfortable in the strong assurance that I was not an "unclaimed blessing" (what an unkind expression!), that I was whole even without a "better half." How I praise God for that assurance.

A close friend, widowed after only 12 years of a good marriage, confided in me once that only in being alone was she able to realize some of her potential as a whole person, to find strengths that would probably have remained suppressed had she still been married. "God has helped me realize," she said, "that the intense pain of losing one-half of myself can be turned into the beautiful realization that I am not part of a whole. I am WHOLE. This has given me a new assurance, a new self-confidence and a different kind of fulfillment."

In various subtle ways, I believe the mainstream (i.e. married) church population often denies single people the enjoyment of their own fulfillment by ascribing to what someone



**"I'm not committed to being single in the sense of actively avoiding relationships.
What I'm committed to is living as though this life is real."**

- Jane Adams, *Wake up Sleeping Beauty*, William Morrow, 1990

has called "the myth of fulfillment and normality." By doing so we tend to influence people into marriage who are neither ready, able, nor even suited to that type of committed relationship. After reading my article, "Singleness is Valid," in our church women's paper, a pastor friend told me, "My wife encouraged me to read your article and it has challenged me! For years, when conducting weddings, I often told the young couple that they were now entering into the ultimate fulfillment. I will no longer be able to say that."

I led a fulfilled, productive, no-regrets single life until the age of 50, when I married a man to whom I have now been happily married for 17 years. Soon after our wedding, an effervescent friend asked, "How's marriage? Isn't it wonderful?" "We're working at it," I replied, and this was obviously not what she expected or hoped to hear. "Well, is that the best you can say for it?" she retorted. I replied that marriage brought many joys, but if I was honest, I also had to say that it took a lot of work, sometimes even hard work. As she walked away, I sensed her bewilderment and disappointment that I was not bubbling over with euphoria.

As a single person, I periodically felt equal bewilderment and disappointment in the reluctance of several married women to ever admit that marriage wasn't always a bed of roses. Some of this is now changing as we begin to deal with revelations of abuse and family violence. But I wish that those of us in good relationships would have the courage to tell it like it is: that the bed of roses is there, but sometimes most of the beautiful flowers are withered and the thorns can be very sharp. Then we need to work at nurturing new buds into full bloom.

I appreciate the honesty of a younger friend of mine whose husband occasionally works away from home for a week at a time. "I have to admit that I look forward to those weeks when I can relax a bit from working at the relationship." By being forthright in admitting that there is both ecstasy and agony in marriage, we could be more helpful to each other. The same applies to giving our single sisters and brothers opportunity to feel free to talk about how they experience the joys and sorrows of their status.

I was not expecting the consequences of what I thought would be the only talk I would give on singleness many years ago. It was at a CMBC chapel about two years before I found myself contemplating marriage. I was quite overwhelmed by the student response, both male and female, and their strong encouragement to continue speaking and writing

on the subject. Said one young woman, "If my mother could hear you, maybe she would relax and not bug me so much about getting married." My presentation was later published, bringing me further speaking engagements, including the one at "The Church and the Single Adult" conference, where I met my future husband. After my engagement, I was both pleased and surprised at how many women (and some men) expressed the hope that this new development would not mean I no longer had anything to say on singleness.

Other married women confronted me in a gloating manner with statements like, "Now you will have to take back some of the things you said and wrote about singleness." I didn't recall ever making an anti-marriage or anti-men statement, and when asked for a specific reference, neither could these women. My intent had always been to promote understanding, support and honor for single people, something I can still do with integrity and honesty while being married to a husband I love and respect.

To those women who ask me, "Aren't you sorry you didn't marry sooner?" my sincere response remains, "No, I do not regret a day of my single life. It was full of rich opportunities, relationships and challenges that I may not have had if I had married earlier. Nor do I regret having married now. It is bringing different kinds of challenges, responsibilities and rewards. Each state can be fulfilling in its own way." Having been blessed with both singleness and now marriage, I say with the psalmist, "I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart for he has set my feet in good places."

Anne Warkentin Dyck spent 20 adventurous and rewarding years as an MCC nurse in Indonesia. She and her husband Leonard now live in High River, Alta., and attend Trinity Mennonite Church in Calgary. Anne is busy with leadership roles in the church, grandchildren, palliative volunteer work, speaking engagements, and, to the delight of her friends and neighbors, cooking her way through the *Extending the Table* cookbook.

By Eleanor Good

Singleness Is...

Singleness is a meaningful and viable lifestyle, a real and satisfying way for me to live my life.

Singleness is not a state of purgatory from which I am waiting to be rescued.

Singleness is having family, friends, faith, career and interests to give an evolving shape to who I am.

Singleness alone is not my primary source of identity.

Singleness, like marriage, has positive and negative impacts.

Singleness is not a state to be considered superior or inferior to marriage.

Singleness means total responsibility for my life's decisions: career, home maintenance, holidays. It is responsibility to myself and to those with whom I work, worship and socialize.

Singleness is not an irresponsible, uncommitted, free and easy lifestyle.

Singleness is stepping forward freely and individually to take my place within the life of my church.

Singleness is not hovering in the wings waiting to be asked to participate in the life of my church.

Singleness is reshaping who I am in relation to my family. It is enjoying parents, siblings, niece and nephew, aunts and uncles, cousins.

Singleness is not being without a family.

Singleness is sometimes being afraid, being afraid for the day-to-day demands of life and job, for my safety and for what the future may hold for me personally and globally.

Singleness is deepening my dependence on God for a sense of peace, divine presence and direction.

Singleness is a growing awareness of who I am, of recognizing my needs, hurts and happiness as part of the faith journey I'm taking.

Singleness is not ignoring myself as a whole person.

Singleness is finding and taking opportunities to invite friends to my home or to initiate social outings.

Singleness is not feeling sorry for myself and waiting to be invited out for dinner.

Singleness is recognizing that some of the attitudes of society and the church assume that marriage is desired by all. It is finding ways to express the satisfactions of the single lifestyle amid such attitudes.

Singleness is not searching the Singles Columns because society says, "You really do want to be married."

Singleness is sometimes being excluded from dinner parties because I do not have a spouse.

Singleness is not the only reason persons are excluded from social times. Sometimes it's because of young children, color, social class or ethnicity.

Singleness is the freedom to walk downtown to the Saturday market and stay all day if I choose.

Singleness is also coming home and realizing that all the chores are mine to do.

Singleness is living with unspoken assumptions about why I am not married.

Singleness is not everyone's choice, nor is it a choice everyone should make.

Singleness is giving and receiving advice, assistance, even tools with neighbors and friends.

Singleness is not total independence.

Singleness is close companionship and intimacy with a variety of friendships.

Singleness is not "Poor me, I have no one to do things with." But sometimes singleness is not having someone to share one's excitement or pain with at the moment we really want to share it. Singleness is not always expressing joys and hurts because there is no one at hand to spill them to.

Singleness is an expression that gives shape and meaning to my life.

Singleness is not experienced in the same way by everyone.

Singleness is life! A God-given gift to be lived to the fullest!

Eleanor Good is an elementary school teacher in London, Ont. She is a member of Valleyview Mennonite Church.

"To be single is to live in the tension between loneliness and solitude, recollection and communion, detachment and encounter."

- Susan Annette Muto,
Celebrating the Single Life,
Doubleday, 1982.

by Pauline Steinmann

Labels vs. Lifestyles

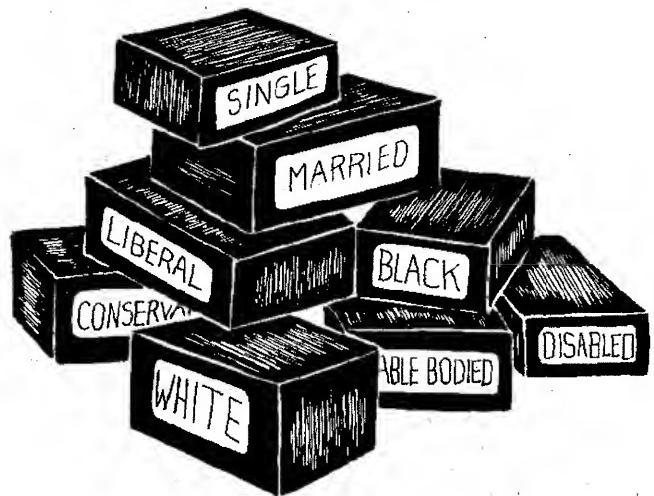
Labels have always made me uncomfortable. They limit rather than liberate. They are a convenience. We claim to understand someone if we can slot them into boxes labelled black or white, liberal or conservative, disabled or able-bodied, single or married. While I am a single woman, singleness is only one part of who I am as a child of God. For me, it neither defines my relationship to others nor my relationship to God.

My ongoing journey as a single woman in the Mennonite church is not something that began with a plan or a dream. As a young child I do not recall spending much time thinking about my potential marital status. I'm sure my unconscious understanding was that I would probably follow in my mother's footsteps and those of most of my relatives—marriage and children. There were very few role models who demonstrated—let alone advocated—a rich, fulfilling life as a single person.

As I grew into my teenage years, my understanding and perspective changed. A church youth group which fostered strong, healthy, platonic relationships with both males and females gave me new insights into who I was as a person. I learned that the church believed it was very acceptable and even desirable to develop friendships with many people. These friendships were intimate, not in the physical sense, but in an emotional sense. Some of these relationships have stood the test of time and still play a very important role in my life today.

As I moved into my 20s, the message began to change. Multiple friendships in the place of one special relationship were no longer advocated. Comments made by well-intentioned church people alluding to my single state, my perceived loneliness or my lack of a partner made me wonder if others thought I was no longer an acceptable member. I was not following the prescribed path for someone of my age and gender. I was struggling within myself to discover and give birth to my personhood—a person who was becoming someone that the church did not know what to do with.

I reacted negatively to the "Bridal College" syndrome and the pairing off that was supposed to happen in these years.



That reaction was exacerbated by insecurities about my own sexuality. I towered above most guys my age and I was overweight—certainly not the ideal catch as a life partner in society's eyes, nor in the eyes of the church! It seemed to me that the ideal woman the church would choose for her sons did not differ significantly from the ideal woman of society.

How then was I supposed to integrate who I was, and who I was becoming, with who the church thought I should be, when the two did not match? It certainly did not appear that being a wife and mother would be my role in life, and in fact I was not at all sure that was what I wanted for myself. I wanted to discover other areas of life. I wanted to travel. I wanted a career. My immediate family accepted me and supported my choices, and yet the church family's expectations for me continued to make me feel confined.

Coping mechanisms can take many forms, and finally for me, it meant leaving my community. Subsequent visits back to my home church only reinforced the idea that for many people, my singleness remained the focal point of my identity. "Where is your boyfriend?" "When is it your turn to get married?" What were the hidden messages in these questions? What were other people's assumptions about the choices I had made?

Away from the formal Mennonite church, I had the space and freedom to discover who I was as a single person. I learned that my identity and my value do not need to be tied to another person. I like myself for who I am. I discovered that my job was both challenging and fulfilling. My friend-

"A woman is usually seen in terms of her relationship to a man, whether past, present or future."

- Kathy Jan Johnson, in
Women in a Strange Land,
Fischer, Breeneman and
Bennett, editors, Fortress
Press. 1975.

ships met my needs and stimulated me to further growth. I found great freedom in this discovery! I enjoy my singleness and for me it is no longer defining nor confining.

I now live back in my home community, though I have chosen not to return to the church in which I grew up. I now feel much more confident in who I am as a person in a Mennonite church—a person who happens to be single. But there are still many times when I struggle against what I perceive to be nonacceptance. When others are not comfortable with my singleness, when they hesitate to invite me or accept my invitations to spend time together because I do not have a man with whom their husband will converse, I do not feel accepted. When I need to find someone to sit with at a Christmas banquet because tables are always set with even numbers, I feel awkward and incomplete. When the church plans Valentines or lovers banquets, I feel excluded. When I am not considered a "family" and therefore do not warrant a visit from a pastor or elder, I feel nonexistent. When it is assumed that because I am single, I will have lots of time to give to the church, I wonder if others think my life is neither rich nor full.

In spite of negative experiences, I choose to remain in the Mennonite church. Why? My roots are here. This is where I was nurtured in my faith. There are many positive influences which I enjoy about my Mennonite community and upbringing. I believe that the church is made up of many members; that we are all parts of one body, but the parts are different; that the church needs diversity rather than uniformity; and that Christ calls each of us to obedience to Him, whether married or single. There are individuals within the church who support me, just as I support them. Our marital status is not a factor.

The church needs individuals to challenge it to greater biblical inclusion of all peoples. I will continue to invite the church to move beyond the use of labels and to make room for and actively support the inclusion of the many parts of the body of Christ. In turn, my commitment is to endeavor to be faithful and accountable to God and the church.

Pauline Steinmann has spent many years working with persons with handicapping conditions. She is currently employed with SELFHELP Crafts Canada in New Hamburg, Ont., responsible for purchasing and producer communications.



The Joy and the Pain of Living Singly

When I was in the ninth grade, each student in my English class was required to write an autobiography. One chapter focused on our future plans and dreams. Among other comments on job choices and career possibilities, I wrote, "While I would like to get married and have a family some day, I believe that I can have a happy and fulfilling life even if I do not get married."

Coming from a large traditional Mennonite family where basic values focused on marriage and child-bearing, I ponder where that openness to remaining single and happy came from at such a young age. Perhaps it was partly seeing an older sister's struggle with her single status, resulting in resentment, low self-esteem and depression. Perhaps it was due to the influence of two never-married aunts who lived vibrant lives filled with travel, fun, friendships and fulfilling careers. In any case, my belief that married and single lifestyles are equally valid and that both have advantages and disadvantages persisted throughout my teen and young adult life into the present.

While I am grateful for many aspects of my single life, there are painful and difficult areas as well. Sometimes the joy and the pain are closely related.

I am grateful for the variety of interesting long- and short-term friendships that have developed over the years. Through friends, I've enjoyed stimulating intellectual and theological discussions, mutual caring and support, a widened world view, relaxing vacations, fun social events and much more. These friends have sustained me in difficult times. However, at times I long for the consistent companionship of a permanent relationship and the growth that can happen from such intense vulnerability and intimacy. I yearn for closeness that has room for conflict and respect, hurt and forgiveness, individuality and commitment.

Another struggle in my singleness relates to sexuality. A female friend and I recently discussed the challenge of living within what we feel is acceptable and appropriate sexual behavior for ourselves as single people, and yet at the same time being only too aware of our raging hormones. Married people may engage in guilt-free, unrestrained sexual activity, while we live with and try to sort through the conflicting messages that come from family, church, society and our own personal experiences.

And what of church? I am grateful to have found a Mennonite congregation where I, as a single person, have as many opportunities as anyone else to become involved and use my gifts. Adult Sunday School classes, for example, are blended—not designed for marrieds or singles. I am not treated differently because of my marriage status.

It has been difficult, however, to be raised in a family where marriage is valued and is the norm among siblings. In my early 20s, it was common at family gatherings to be asked if I had a boyfriend. I tried to dismiss this as well-meaning interest in my life, but the louder message I heard was that in this family, one should be married or at least working toward it. After a number of unsuccessful attempts by various family members to match me up, I finally shared my feelings as forthrightly as I could about being single and dealing with these undermining comments. Over the years, the pressure to conform to the family norm has decreased, as have my own sensitivities. Maybe these comments don't imply that as a single person I don't belong; maybe they are just clumsy attempts to express interest in my welfare.

My singleness has enabled me to pursue a career, and currently I am able to pursue the advanced education needed to make my career a reality, unencumbered by the complications of a family. Along with this freedom, of course, comes responsibility. At times I am almost overwhelmed by always needing to make major life decisions essentially alone, not to mention the prospect of being financially dependent only on myself indefinitely.

As a single person, I can incorporate long periods of reflection and inner growth into my life. I can schedule solitude retreats at will, or journal for several uninterrupted hours on a Sunday afternoon. The pitfall, of course, is that too much aloneness can turn into loneliness. Staying balanced becomes a conscious effort without benefit of a spouse, children or significant other. Regular intensive therapy was extremely helpful at a critical point in my life, and I recognize that if I were not single, I might not have had the resources to make that possible.

As I enter my mid-thirties, I am becoming more aware of the biological time clock. My value system does not allow me to pursue pregnancy and motherhood without a committed partner. With tinges of grief, I have to face the reality that this desire may never be fulfilled. This makes friendships with other people's children all the more special, and I am grateful for relatives and friends who help make that happen. Last year I had the privilege of being with my sister and brother-in-law during the birth of their baby girl. In addition to the emotional impact of the birth process, this also allowed me to enter more fully into conversations with friends and relatives who are mothers.

All things considered, I still would like to "get married and have a family some day," as I wrote in ninth grade. If that never happens, however, I am grateful I can view myself as having a happy and fulfilled life as a single person. The world and the church need to be big enough for us all.

The author, 33, is a graduate student and attends an urban Mennonite church.

Single in Your 40s: Older Doesn't Necessarily Mean Easier

Forty-one, single, and no foreseeable prospects for any change in marital status. This is not the scenario I pictured for myself 10 or 20 years ago! It was easy then to remain optimistic that it was only a matter of time before love, marriage, my own family and a white picket fence all fell into place. As time marches on, however, I've had to come to terms with the reality that marriage may never be an option for me and that a single life may be the only one I'll ever have.

My feelings about being single are changing as I get older—for the worse, not the better! The years immediately following university were full of too many things to be concerned about finding a mate. A new job, setting up a household, exotic vacations—these were my priorities. But as a number of my single “bosom buddies” began to trade the single life for marriage, I began to question if all the things I'd been so busy pursuing were all that important. Even now, despite a fulfilling life and being fully aware of all the pluses of being single, my preference is still to be married. Is my singleness permanent? Do I dare still hope for marriage? Why have I never found my special someone?

Singlehood, like marriage, has both its ups and its down. My chores, my menus, my time, my money—they are all mine and mine alone. But the solitude and independence I cherish can also be the hardest to deal with. Why hurry home to share exciting news when there's nobody there to greet you? Why bother trying new recipes if you're the only one to sit down at the table? (Why even set the table?) Vacation can be a real challenge—who can I find this year who will be compatible with my travel plans? And then there's financial planning, car maintenance and house repairs—how I envy those who have a spouse to share in decision making. Probably the hardest thing I do each week is go to church alone on Sunday morning. For some reason, I find it very difficult to go into the sanctuary by myself and find a seat.



There are also internal challenges a never-married person needs to deal with. Feelings of low self-esteem surface more often the older and “more single” I become—feelings which would shock friends and family who see me as attractive, outgoing, fulfilled and upbeat. Why have I been passed over? What is it about my lifestyle that has never put me in the right place at the right time to meet the right man?

Family gatherings have always been difficult. The others have their own families—I'm always the one arriving and leaving alone, the odd person out in family photos, the reason our adult gift exchange never works out. I feel the same way when I'm with some of my married friends. What can I contribute to a conversation that centers on kids and husbands? My immediate family sees my independent lifestyle as nothing but positive—but they don't really understand my special needs as a single person because they've never been in my situation. Rather than family, it's the close friendships I cherish with single friends that get me through the trying times.

Where does God fit into all of this? Has God turned a deaf ear to my single cries? If marriage is not to be mine, why am I not more content with my singleness? Where is the church family for me, as it marches two-by-two to banquets, Sunday School picnics and wedding receptions? I find comfort in knowing that God loves me for who I am—with or without a wedding ring around my finger. He also knows my frustrations and wants me to deal honestly with them. Church needs to be a place where little girls are socialized to grow up in fullness and productivity as individuals. Maybe then we can avoid some of the disappointments when singleness appears to be a permanent state and not a temporary one.

The writer is an outgoing physical fitness buff, legal secretary and jelly bean freak living in a large western city.

Singles value immensely the image of the Church as the family of God. It is important to sense that one belongs to this family.

- Susan Annette Muto,
Celebrating the Single Life,
Doubleday, 1982.

Single at 60

Singleness comes with a set of advantages and disadvantages. And because it doesn't follow the expected (read: normal) pattern of marriage, it also comes with a certain amount of curiosity. Why didn't she marry? Did she think she was "too good"? Was there never a proposal? What many people don't realize is that singleness for many is a choice: faced with the choice of marriage to the wrong man or remaining single, some women choose the latter.

Being single has its advantages: financial independence, privacy, friendships. Though the joys of parenthood are not ours, neither are the incessant responsibilities, worries, frustrations and pain of having children. Decisions to follow the Lord's leading—even if it takes us down unorthodox or demanding roads—are perhaps easier to make if one doesn't have family responsibilities. Long-term service opportunities are very real options when one doesn't have to worry about disrupting the lives of spouses and children.

But with the advantages come disadvantages, and the Christian single woman has probably experienced the most pain of her status from the church family. Time after time, in a variety of ways, we receive the unspoken (or even spoken) message that the ministry of the church is to care for the home and family. Church society is no different than secular society: it thinks in twos. When will we learn that seven people can enjoy dinner together just as much as six or eight? One pastor we know expressed his belief that only in a marriage relationship could you experience the real relationship between Christ and the church. A summer Bible school program arranged household help for its teachers—as long as they were married with families. No one seemed to think that a single woman with a demanding career and extended family responsibilities might also appreciate some help as she tried to incorporate yet another church activity into her busy life.

We are sisters, both now in our sixties, and we do see some attitudes changing for the better in our churches. Single women in the 1950s and 60s received very little support or approval to pursue a career. It was not uncommon to be asked to forego marriage in order to take care of aging parents. Few single women owned real estate, let alone established households and lives away from parents.

We feel never-married women are perceived differently from widows. Widows are supported and honored by the church family. Some widows themselves send out the message that they are somehow in an elevated position. And not being parents is something we came to terms with a long time ago—it doesn't necessarily mean that our lives are empty or unfulfilled.

There is still a lot of room in our church families for improved attitudes toward single people in general and single women in particular. All of us should be recognized as whole persons and not half of another relationship. In Christ we are neither male nor female, married nor single, but one in Christ.

The co-writers, sisters, are members of a small rural Mennonite church in the mid-west. In addition to rewarding professional careers, both have worked in service assignments with MCC.



by Margaret Hunsberger

Singleness: Living in the Paradox

When I tried to figure out why I was having so much trouble settling down to write about life without a partner, I realized that it was more than reluctance to submit to the discipline of writing. Two factors arise: this is personal territory in which I normally keep my thoughts to myself; and it's a subject about which I don't quite know what to say, because for me it's full of ambivalence and paradox.

Singleness is liberating. I'm free to make my own choices and pursue my career. When someone suddenly suggests going out for dinner or extending a work meeting, I don't have to pick up children from somewhere, phone home or go into lengthy explanations about family demands. If I want to move to another city, I don't have to consider whether or not a spouse will be able to find work in the new location.

Singleness is limiting. Some activities, such as movies, are within my comfort zone to do alone, but others—from concerts to rodeos—aren't. Sharing the event is as important as attending it. I don't mind going to church alone because my congregation values individuals, but churches with a strong family emphasis might pose a concern.

Singleness is lonely. The absence of emotional and physical intimacy is a reality of my life. There is no one to help shake off the day's tensions with a good laugh, or to put trivial irritations into perspective. By necessity, I'm pushed to keep my own sense of perspective without relying on others—maybe a good thing, but it doesn't necessarily feel that way. There are times when all I want and/or need is a hug...and yet I think it's easy for women alone to romanticize the intimacy we imagine others to have. In reality, I suspect, loneliness is just a fact of life.

Singleness has solitude. For me that's a form of bliss. After a demanding day at work, I love to come home where I can possess my soul in silence, lose myself in a book, enjoy my flowers, turn music on or off—that's relief, relaxation, respite.

Singleness has stability. Things stay where I put them. They're lost if I lose them. They get done only if I do them.



No one comes home and suddenly announces anything—desirable or traumatic.

Singleness means dealing with doubt. Decisions are difficult to make, and I often wish there was someone to help make them. Ironically, the more important the decision, the more personal it is likely to be, and therefore the less chance that there is anyone to talk with. Even with the empathetic ear and good advice of a friend, it's still my decision, my risk.

"The church has long benefited from the talents and abilities of the single woman but has seldom been supportive in return."

- Kathy Jan Johnson, in *Women in a Strange Land*, Fischer, Breeneman and Bennett, editors, Fortress Press. 1975.

and my consequences. No one is in it with me. With finances, for example, I have little difficulty managing on a day-to-day basis, but I feel overwhelmed and inadequate about investment decisions.

Singleness involves a potentially poor future. Three-quarters of the elderly poor in Canada are women alone. That's a statistic to chill the heart, especially if one is a woman alone. Of course, not all are never-married; some are single because of divorce or widowhood. Nevertheless, many are never-married women whose earning power and investment skills were limited during their working years. And what happens when health fails and mobility is limited? What happens when one grows old?

Singleness is poor in status. Any respect granted to a woman alone is hard-earned. While significant gains in women's rights have been made in recent years, the social structure is still biased toward couples, and men still hold most of the marbles. Well-paid positions are occupied largely by men. Well-heeled social positions are held by married women. Most married women I know have a lifestyle, possessions and a home they could not afford on their own. The positive side of this for single women is that it forces us to think more about stewardship and be less susceptible to creeping materialism.

Singleness is rich in friendships, an area where I am really blessed. My friends are wonderful. I'm not referring here to acquaintances or interest groups. I mean individuals who willingly and joyfully share their lives. In a society which emphasizes sexual relationships and gives little attention to friendship, I have learned what a delight friendship is, and what a treasure my friends are. Some of these friends are single and some are married. Some are wives and some are husbands. They enrich my life immeasurably in innumerable ways.

As I write this, it's a glorious autumn afternoon. And I'm going for a walk. By myself.

Margaret Hunsberger attends South Calgary Inter-Mennonite Church and is a professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Calgary.

What's Hard, What's Rewarding, What's Frustrating About Being Single

What's Hard?

- Decision making.
- House and car maintenance.
- Coming home to an empty house after holidays.
- Probably the hardest thing I do each week is to go to church alone Sunday morning. For some reason, I find it very difficult to go into the sanctuary and find a seat, even though I know many people and enjoy meeting new persons.

What's Rewarding?

- I believe my singleness has had a positive impact on my relationship with God. Because I have often felt at the end of my resources and had no human "significant other" to turn to, I have become more dependant on God. I believe my singleness has led me with God's help to try new things, develop skills, overcome shyness and accept career choices.
- Privacy, time and flexibility.
- A support system of "inner circle" friendships, friendships which would probably not be so intimate and supportive had I had a spouse.

What's Frustrating?

- Church people who assume that every person should and will be married. Comments like, "I'm praying that God will bring you a husband" assume that a single woman wants that prayer prayed on her behalf.

At age 43, as a person who loves the job I do, having time to travel and enjoy long coffee breaks with friends, spending time by myself, being able to hide away and read a good book after a busy week...I would be very cautious now about entering into marriage. If I could keep all that plus enter into a great marriage relationship, then I would probably choose marriage. Sometimes I do ask God why He hasn't brought the "perfect" mate into my life. But if that never happens, I rejoice with the knowledge that the life I have now is not "second best."

The writer was a missionary nurse for 11 years and is now director of Women's Ministries in a large church.

As singles we must not be content to sit passively in Church, waiting for others to make plans for our happiness.

- Susan Annette Muto,
Celebrating the Single Life,
Doubleday, 1982.

'Once Carol told a man, on their first date, that she was a widow. A few times she's implied to other people that she's been divorced.

"Somehow that seems more acceptable than saying I've never been married, although I hate myself when I do it."

- Jane Adams, *Wake up Sleeping Beauty*, William Morrow, 1990

Letters

I especially took courage at Luann Habagger Martin's quote of Gloria Steinem (20th Anniversary issue, July-August) that change proceeds more in a spiral than a straight line, and that repeating patterns over and over again is not necessarily fruitless. A spiral proceeds in an upward or forward motion instead of a straight beeline. I want to think some more about this in relation to women's concerns in a general way as well as in some specific matters. Thanks for your dedicated work. May you be tireless forever!

—Margaret Metzler, Luo Yang, Henan, People's Republic of China

A friend recently introduced me to Report, and I have read several back issues with great interest. I would appreciate hearing from (either directly or through pages of your publication) single women—those who have never married, those who have been widowed, and/or those who have been separated or divorced. I would particularly be interested in hearing the stories and sharing the experiences of women like me, who, despite their Mennonite faith and their sincerely made vows "until death do us part," chose to leave abusive marriages in order to survive. I would like to hear stories of women whose abuse was emotional and spiritual (as opposed to primarily physical or sexual). I would be interested in hearing how their churches and their communities have responded to their singleness; whether their respective churches and communities have believed them or supported them when there were no physical bruises to show for the abuse; how they have come to terms with the "forgiven but disqualified" status (a graphic description I read in an article whose author I have unfortunately not remembered) that so frequently is bestowed on us. Thank you for your thought-provoking publication. I am sending a check to your Canadian office to begin receiving my own copy.

—Jenny MacKey, 1 Rose St., Morden MB R6M 1J6

Hopefully this request finds all the women of Mennonite Central Committee enjoying your freedom, family, home. Back in 1984, I lost everyone and everything I love over the death of a drug dealer. I am not guilty. Because of my separation from family/home, I have become very lonely. Perhaps there are women within your organization who

More Voices from Report Readers

What topics would our readers like to see MCC Women's Concerns address? In 1993 we sent a survey to 550 readers. Following are some of the many suggestions you made of issues you'd like to see addressed by the Women's Concerns committee and in Women's Concerns Report:

- racism
- women working ecumenically
- women and aging
- women's relationships across class lines
- abuse of power
- stay-at-home mothers
- violence and children's attitudes
- equality in the home
- women and anger
- female images of God
- women refugees
- sexual/physical/mental abuse
- Mennonite women writers/women in literature written by Mennonite authors
- women's theology
- women's health

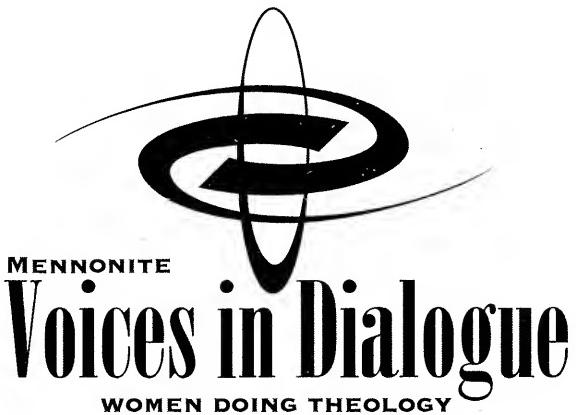
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would care enough to correspond with an incarcerated woman who has life plus. Perhaps there are concerned ladies with enough extra time on their hands to correspond with me from time to time. I hope so!

I am 45, Caucasian and from Florida. I have been in TCI [correctional institute] since 1985. I haven't seen my family (three children, one grandchild) since 1984. Or my beloved parents ever since my incarceration as well. I will appreciate whatever assistance you can give me in my special request for penpals. Thank you.

—Lois Landis, N-7139 County Road, Fond Du Lac WI 54835-9099

- abortion
- raising children with less gender bias
- women in the fine arts
- spirituality of women
- effects of patriarchy
- sex education
- women who choose to be childless
- male-female communication
- sexual orientation
- Christian witness in the marketplace
- financial planning
- international women's stories
- friendship
- forgiveness
- sexual harassment in the church
- AIDS
- hospitality
- youth issues
- family devotions and teaching values
- SELFHELP Crafts and the people involved
- loneliness and purpose in life
- service in the 90s
- peace witness
- women and poverty
- men as parents
- spirituality issues for wounded persons
- euthanasia
- raising children to have respect and morals



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Rachel Reesor
Mary H. Schertz

New Vision for Anabaptist Feminism:
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Wilma Ann Bailey

PRE-REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED.

For information contact:

Tina Mast Burnett
MCC Women's Concerns
Box 500, Akron, PA 17501
717-859-3889

Women in Mission

- **Marilyn Kern** began in September as pastor at Oak Park (Ill.) Mennonite Church.
- **Paula Diller Lehman**, pastor at Faith Community Mennonite Church in Minneapolis, was ordained November 14.
- **Evelyn Shenk** has been ordained for service as a chaplain at Bridgewater (Va.) Home.
- **Rachel and Ivan Friesen** were licensed October 10 to serve as pastors of Oak Hill Mennonite Church in Winston-Salem, N.C.
- **Dorothy Y. Shank** was ordained for stewardship ministries on October 3. She and her husband Orval are serving as itinerant stewardship ministers in Virginia congregations and the wider church.

Book review

A Timeless Story for All Women

A Quiet Strength: The Susanna Ruth Krehbiel Story, by Amelia Mueller (Faith and Life Press, Newton, Kansas, 1993, 146pp)

This biography begins with Susanna's early school years in Bavaria and concludes with her death in Halstead, Kansas in 1920. Yet more than a biography, it is a Bildungsroman, a psychological profile, featuring a perceptive, bright and determined girl growing up to be a woman of "quiet strength" whose life touches the lives of many.

Susanna Ruth lives with her family in Eichstock, a farmstead in Bavaria. In 1852, when she is ten, in order to avoid the military draft of her older brother, her parents decide to immigrate to America. The wagon ride, the train, a boat on the Rhine and finally a huge ship with 700 passengers crossing the Atlantic, all bring new adventures to the receptive Susanna. Then in the new country, the train to Buffalo, Cleveland, Chicago and finally the canal boat to West Point, Iowa, add even more experiences. She is saddened by the death of her grandpa and baby sister; she is happy in finding Christian Krehbiel, the neighbor from the old country, again.

In 1857, Susanna and Christian are married. The early years involve many hours of being with one another, sharing their love in their small house adjacent to her parents. Susanna will recall these years frequently in the years to come when they are too busy with the growing family and the farm operations. It is not until 1909, when Christian has his stroke, that they once again spend many hours together as she tenderly cares for her failing husband.

During their more than 50 years of marriage, they move several times, first from Iowa to Springfield, Ill., then to Halstead, Kan. All the while, Christian is very much taken up with church responsibilities: minister, field secretary, home missionary, president of foreign missions. He is also very much involved with the 1873 Russian Mennonite immigration, particularly to Kansas. Many times he is gone from

home; frequently Susanna entertains guests at her home. After Christian's death, Susanna lives with her son until her death in 1920.

We have read many such biographies. What makes this one different is that it is a Bildungsroman that goes beyond the immediate. It is a story about us and our daughters and our granddaughters if we choose to live life to the fullest, embracing every challenge as did Susanna. She is energetic and works hard with her mother, later with her own family; she suffers loss and gains new strength; she provides support for her spouse and for her extended family who need help; she gives hospitality generously. Immediate circumstances change, but overriding principles remain.

When I was a small girl and became too preoccupied with self and physical beauty, my mother asked me to read Proverbs 31, the description of the virtuous woman. Years later, I tell my daughter about this biblical portrait. And so we pass on from generation to generation our interpretation of what a virtuous woman is according to our times, our demands and our expectations. The immediate details may change with time and culture, but the principles of courage, strength, integrity and faith remain constant. And so it is with Susanna's story. No longer do we drive to church in wagons, feed a dozen threshers or give birth to fifteen children, but we aspire for the same faith and "quiet strength" to meet equally challenging tasks as we live life fully.

—Reviewed by Linda Suter, Bluffton (Ohio) College.

"Besides marriage, belongingness can be found in family, friendships and church. Singles are not incomplete or abnormal because they are not married."

- Charles Sell, *Transitions Through Adult Life*, Zondervan, 1985.

- "Living Letters" is a unique program of visits to churches around the world, marking the midpoint of the **Ecumenical Decade: Churches in Solidarity with Women 1988-1998**, sponsored by World Council of Churches. The plan is for teams of women to visit WCC member churches, local ecumenical decade groups and women's associations around the world. The groups will share and hear information on women's activities in church and community.

- "Yet in My Dreams," a 20-minute video produced by John Ruth, addresses the church's response to those experiencing **chronic mental illness**. Cost is \$18. Order from: Karen Jantzi, 198 Game Farm Rd., Schwenksville, PA 19473.

- **Sophia** is a women's magazine published three times a year by a group of **Mennonite Brethren women** in Winnipeg, Man. It is in its second year of publication. The magazine is a "forum for Mennonite Brethren women, providing room for them to speak to each other about their place in the family, the church, the workplace and the world." Editor is Sarah Klassen. The periodical has an editorial committee and advisory board, made up of women from various backgrounds and professions. For information contact Sarah Klassen, 204-334-5793, or write: Sophia, Box 29062, 1453 Henderson Hwy., Winnipeg, MB R2G 4E9.

- **Borderwatch**, a third book of poetry by Sarah Klassen of Winnipeg, Man., was released in April by Netherlandic Press.

- **Mennonot: For Mennos on the Margins** is a new publication that gives voice to people on the margins of the institutional Mennonite Church. Mennonot is a forum for Mennonite culture and art, satire and honest discussion of unorthodox religious, ethical and political beliefs, spirituality and sexuality. It is "published at will" by Sheri Hostetler of Oakland, Calif., and Steve Mullet of Elkhart, Ind. To receive the first two issues, send \$5 to *Mennonot*, c/o Steve Mullet, 1721 Roys Ave., Elkhart, IN 46516.

- A conference on sexual abuse will be April 29-30 at Breslau (Ont.) Mennonite Church. Sponsored by MCC Ontario, Shalom Counseling and the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies at Conrad Grebel College, the conference is intended to deepen understanding of and

News and Verbs

- "Mennonite Voices in Dialogue: Women Doing Theology," is a conference sponsored by MCC Women's Concerns and Bluffton (Ohio) College. The conference will be June 23-25 at Bluffton College. Pre-registration is required. For information contact: Tina Mast Burnett, Women's Concerns, Box 500, Akron, PA 17501; 717-859-3889.
- MCC Canada Women's Concerns is encouraging churches to designate one Sunday to reflect on family violence in our midst. They have produced a worship and Christian education resource packet for use on that Sunday. Contact MCC Women's Concerns or any MCC office for a packet.



Illustrations in this issue were drawn by Teresa Pankratz of Chicago. Please do not reproduce without permission.

response to abuse. Carolyn Holderread Heggen will be the main speaker. Contact Esther Epp-Tiessen, MCC Ontario, 519-745-8458.

- The Commission on Education of the General Conference Mennonite Church has appointed Eleanor Snyder **director of children's education**, effective Feb. 1, 1994. Her office will be in the Kitchener-Waterloo, Ont., area.
- Mary Dyck, Eureka, Ill., is new president of **Mennonite Nurses Association**.
- Cheryl Zehr Walker of Ephrata, Pa., is new chair of **Council on Church and Media**.
- Shirley B. Yoder, vice president of Corporate Services at Mennonite Mutual Aid, Goshen, Ind., has been appointed

WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. The committee, formed in 1973, believes that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committee strives to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures in which men and women can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in REPORT do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committee on Women's Concerns.

WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT is edited by Kristina Mast Burnett. Layout by Janice Wiebe Ollenburg. Correspondence and address changes should be send to Kristina Mast Burnett, Women's Concerns, MCC, P.O. Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500.

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to serve on the National Task Force on the **Future of Addictions Treatment**.

- Carolyn Gundy is new director for **Management Development Program** at Goshen (Ind.) College. The program offers evening classes and in-house seminars to business people.
- Wendy Endress is new director of Bluffton (Ohio) College **Career Development Center**.
- Gloria Martin Eby was been appointed **director of development** at Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ont.
- A consultation on **Women, Abuse and the Bible** will be April 15-16 at the Chicago O'Hare Marriott. The consultation is sponsored by Christians for Biblical Equality, 380 Layafette Road South, Suite 122, St. Paul, MN 55107; 612-224-2416.
- According to the United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development, the number of rural **women living in absolute poverty** around the world rose over the last two decades by about 50 percent—from an estimated 370 million to 565 million—compared with a 30 percent increase for men (from a report by Emily Will in *The Mennonite*, Sept. 14, 1993).



**Mennonite
Central
Committee**

21 South 12th Street
PO Box 500
Akron, PA
17501-0500